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ABSTRACT

Passport in Time (PIT), a volunteer program of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, is an excellent recreational learning experience. Families work side-by-side with professional archaeologists and historians to excavate, record, and restore historic and prehistoric sites across the United States. In addition, families conduct library research, organize archival data, and produce interpretive brochures. This paper recounts one summer's experiences with PIT when members of a single family gained a new understanding of human history. (Author/BT)

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Archeology as Family Recreation: The Passport in Time Program

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Archeology as Family Recreation: The Passport in Time Program

Abstract

Passport in Time, a volunteer program of the USDA Forest Service, is an excellent recreational learning experience. Families work side-by-side with professional archeologists and historians to excavate, record, and restore historic and prehistoric sites across America. In addition, families conduct library research, organize archival data, and produce interpretive brochures.

Introduction

Passport in Time (PIT) is an exciting volunteer archaeology and historic preservation program of the USDA Forest Service (FS). Adult and mature youth volunteers do not merely observe. They learn by participating in ongoing research and management projects, working alongside professional archaeologists and historians. Volunteer labor is recorded in a personal PIT Passport, documenting field site, date, and hours worked.

PIT projects including surveying and excavating archaeological sites, restoring rock art and historic sites, gathering oral histories, archival research and writing interpretive brochures. PIT sites are numerous, across national forests, grasslands, and prairies managed by the FS. (Fieldwork is unsuitable for very young children and those for whom outdoor labor is difficult.)

History of PIT

Gordon Peters, the founder of PIT, taught field schools on FS sites in MN. Naturalists from lakeside resorts brought guests to see archeologists at work, a popular outing. In response to requests from the naturalists and FS interpretive specialists,

Peters agreed to continue his fieldwork and invite volunteers to participate. "That was the beginning of something beautiful!" Peters said (Passport in Time, 2001).

In 1989-90, the project expanded to other FS sites in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Utah. Archeologist Mike Beckes convinced FS administrators to officially recognize PIT as a national program in 1991. Since its inception, PIT projects have been conducted in 117 national forests in 36 states.

"Volunteers have helped to stabilize ancient cliff dwellings in New Mexico, excavate a 10,000-year-old village site in Minnesota, restore a historic lookout tower in Oregon, clean vandalized rock art in Colorado, survey for sites in a rugged Montana wilderness, and excavate a 19th-century Chinese mining site in Hell's Canyon in Idaho" (Passport in Time, 2001).

PIT program participation is compatible with conceptual foundations of the Baccalaureate Degree Standards established by the National Park and Recreation Association:

> 8.04 Understanding of the significance of play, recreation, and leisure throughout the life cycle relative to the individual's attitudes, values, behaviors, and use of resources.
>
> 8.05 Knowledge of the interrelationship between leisure behavior and the natural environment (NRPA, 2001).

An Educator's Experiences

During the summer of 2001, an university faculty member and his family participated in their first PIT project, joint field schools venture between the FS in the George Washington National Forest and the Archeological Society of Virginia. We

planned to combine a family driving and camping vacation with volunteer fieldwork – learning while recreating. Our goal was to learn and play together outdoors and become self-sufficient as a family, free from modern conveniences and technology.

The natural mountain scenery was spectacular. Hidden Valley is nestled in a secluded area near the resort villages of Warm Springs and Hot Springs, Virginia. On our way to the field site, we visited Falling Springs Water Fall, described by Thomas Jefferson as one of the great natural wonders of Virginia. After days of fieldwork, tired muscles found relief in the Jefferson Baths, hot mineral springs used for healing for centuries. While hiking along fields and rocky river beds, we came upon buck deer, does and fawns, rabbits, turkey, one splashy beaver, and an elusive mountain cat.

We joined other PIT volunteers and tent camped in the nearby rustic Hidden Valley Campground. Volunteers came from many states, Virginia, West Virginia, Florida, Alabama, Colorado, and the District of Columbia. Many were retired seniors with a love of travel and camping in national parks and forests.

During our orientation the following morning, we learned about the known history of Hidden Valley. Native Americans were present in 6500 B.C. The first Europeans settled in the mid-18th century (USDA Forest Service Southern Region, 1998).

Our task was to excavate and record artifacts at site 44BA32 in Bath County, Virginia. Auger tests revealed an upper level plow zone of sandy dark brown loam above a bright yellow clay subsoil. Each layer represented a different period. We sought physical evidence of past habitation.

We listened carefully to archeologists' explanations of field methodology. Recovery techniques varied as to provenience. We were assigned to small work groups

of 3-4. Within our group, we learned to carefully excavate, map, and photograph our small plot of earth, 5 feet wide by 5 feet long.

We hoped to uncover evidence of a Late Woodland hamlet beneath a field of hay on a bluff of the Jackson River. The Woodland period in Virginia lasted from A.D. 1000 to A.D. 1675. We learned to apply the scientific method to archeology fieldwork. Our tools were simple, keen observation skills, shovel, trowel, 5-gallon buckets, scale, wire mesh screen and saw horses, graph paper, ruler, plumb bob, measuring tape, and camera.

Near the surface was the plow zone. We removed and dry-sifted artifacts. Here, we found small mammal bones and fire-cracked rock. All had been disturbed during many years of farming.

Digging below the surface soil, our progress was slow. Historic artifacts were recorded, identified and separately bagged. All artifacts were separated as lithic (stone or rock), ceramics, bone, and historic (metal, wood)

Premature removal of artifacts erases important clues about its meaning. Soil was sifted to reveal small finds. At the transition between the plow zone and undisturbed soil, we discovered remains of colonial life (an ivory button, metal buckle, clay pipe stems, a bent pewter spoon, shards of glazed ceramics, and more mammal bones discarded from early meals).

Deeper still, we were thrilled to retrieve prehistoric artifacts including bear teeth, deer bone, and periwinkle shells, a dietary staple in lean winter months. Limestone-tempered ceramics, projectile points, stone tools, post molds, and food storage pits

brought whoops of delight from all volunteers. Artifacts were cleansed with water, dried, and bagged for further study in a laboratory.

Conclusion

All members of the family gained a new understanding of human history. We learned to appreciate the tedious and dedicated work of professional archeologists. Recreation through active learning with the PIT project afforded a great opportunity for history to "come to life."

The hot summer days passed quickly, since we were intensely focused on our physical work. We marveled at simple objects crafted centuries ago. To extend our learning adventure, we visited historic sites in Virginia, Maine, and Nova Scotia, Canada.

The rewards for PIT volunteers are many. Outdoor activities are healthy alternatives for the video game generation. Our teenage son assisted us to gather and pack camping supplies. He shared meal preparation and he was accepted as a full member of the field team. He arose early and returned to work. His efforts were motivated by the opportunity to perform the same tasks as adult volunteers.

We appreciated receiving tokens with the PIT "moose" logo. However, intangible rewards were even more important, e.g., a new sense of kinship with prehistoric residents of the southeast. Friendships were formed with the other volunteers and professional archeologists as we shared lunch in the field, swapped stories and discoveries, and learned to refine our methods. It was difficult to leave at the end of the week. We will return to other PIT projects!

Visit USDA web site at URL http://www.passportintime.com/ for more information about PIT. Park Net of the National Park Service offers educational resources of the Archeology and Ethnography Program: Explore, Learn, and Participate (http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/particip.htm).

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